

1998–1999 Louisiana State Education Progress Report



Louisiana Department of Education

Cecil J. Picard, Superintendent

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A Word From Your State Superintendent



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On behalf of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Louisiana Department of Education is pleased to present the 1998-99 Louisiana State Education Progress Report. This year marks the tenth year that Louisiana provides the public with an annual education “report card,” giving a state overview of public education progress. And for the first time, information from Louisiana’s new School Accountability System is included. District Composite Reports, along with this report, provide information on the effectiveness of educational programs and services offered to our children. These reports are intended to raise awareness of the status of public education in Louisiana, assist in assessing the effectiveness of schools and school systems, and provide a basis for educational planning and program improvement.

Over the past few years, Louisiana has been on the cutting edge of educational reform initiatives with new higher level standards for what students are expected to know and be able to do, more complex student tests tied to the standards, a Kindergarten through third grade Reading and Mathematics Initiative, a focus on the early years, an infusion of instructional technology, and a School and District Accountability System that holds schools responsible for student learning. Louisiana’s Accountability System now clearly reports to the public how well individual public schools are doing. In September 1999, 1188 K-8 schools received School Performance Scores for the first time. And in 2001, 9-12 schools will receive School Performance Scores.

There is much to be excited and proud about in Louisiana. We are making measurable progress by reducing the number of students dropping out, reducing class size, increasing teacher salaries and number of faculty members with advanced degrees, improving student test scores, and increasing student attendance. The National Education Goals Panel in October 1999 awarded Louisiana a gold star for 4th grade reading improvement over time and also honored Louisiana for greater than expected rates of growth in reading

achievement. Louisiana scores are up on the ACT, SAT, National Assessment of Educational Progress, Developmental Reading Assessment, and The Iowa Tests. And Education Week, a national publication, in January 1999 stated, "Louisiana will soon have one of the nation's most comprehensive accountability systems..."

While we have a great deal to be proud of, we still have many challenges to overcome: the number of certified teachers is declining; student scores in mathematics are a major concern; we have far too many students suspended and expelled; too many schools are low performing; and we need to reach children earlier with education, services, and opportunities.

I strongly encourage communities, local education agencies, educators, teachers, parents, students, policymakers, and other stakeholders to review this report and to use this information to become actively involved in improving our schools. Our ultimate goal is to equip all of our children with the skills they will need in the workplaces of the future.

Cecil J. Picard

State Superintendent of Education

Executive Summary

The following is a brief summary of the findings and analysis of Louisiana educational data for the 1998-99 school year. The report sections following this summary provide further detail on each education performance indicator.

- First-year implementation of the accountability program in kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) schools resulted in identification of 5% of the 1,188 schools as academically unacceptable and 9% as meeting the 10-year goal.
- Most accountability schools (86%) were in the two categories of Academically Below Average and Academically Above Average.
- Public school class size is getting smaller. Compared with 1997-98 data, the percent of small classes (1-20 students) increased from 34.4% to 37%, while the percent of large classes (27 or more students) decreased from 26.2% to 24.6%.
- The educational level of Louisiana teachers improved in 1998-99. Statewide, 42% of faculty members had advanced degrees, an increase of over 2% from 1997-98.
- On LEAP 21 tests at the 4th grade level, 55% of students in English Language Arts and 41% of students in Mathematics scored in the basic or higher categories. At the 8th grade level, 44% and 39% of students scored basic or higher on the two tests.
- On *The Iowa Tests*, 1998-99 results in 6th and 9th grades showed an improvement of one percentage point over 1997-98 results.
- For a second straight year, the Louisiana ACT composite score increased by 0.1, to 19.6, while the national composite score remained constant at 21.0.
- Between 1989 and 1999, on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the verbal mean score increased 12 points and the mathematics mean score increased 24 points for Louisiana students.

Executive Summary (continued)

- Compared to the prior fall semester, the percent of public high school graduates who enrolled as first-time college freshmen in the Fall of 1998 increased from 40% to 43%, while the percent enrolled in at least one remedial or developmental course decreased from 47% to 46%.
- The public school student population for 1998-99 was 766,274, a slight decrease (0.7%) compared with the 1997-98 population figure.
- During the 1998-1999 school year, 58% of Louisiana students participated in the Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch Program.
- The student attendance rate inched up slightly to 93.5% from the 93.4% rate in 1997-98. This rate represents an average of approximately 50,000 students (6.5% of the total student population) who were absent for any given school day.
- Of the four school types, the highest 1998-99 suspension rates were reported by middle schools for in-school (16.4%) and out-of-school (19.4%) suspensions.
- Statewide, 76.5% of 2nd graders and 69.8% of 3rd graders were reading on or above grade level in the spring semester of 1999, a large improvement over fall semester 1998 findings.
- In 1999, Louisiana was one of only seven states awarded a Gold Star for *Improvement Over Time in Fourth Grade Reading* by The National Education Goals Panel.



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Introduction

The vision of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) is to lead the state in the development of a world class educational system that fosters lifelong learning and that places a high value on education. Under the guidance of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (SBESE), the LDE proposes initiatives and collaborates with the Governor's office and the Legislature to design and implement new educational programs and initiatives.

Several significant projects are now under way at the Department. As described in this publication, these critical building blocks lay the foundation for school improvement. They also pave the way toward achieving the LDE's mission of providing visionary leadership that seeks to identify educational and related needs of the people and to provide quality services that meet those needs, thus enhancing the quality of life for all Louisiana citizens.

Foundations for School Improvement

The Louisiana school improvement plan, initiated with the enactment of the Children First Act in 1988, had as its first priority the collection, analysis, and reporting of educational data in annual *Progress Profiles* reports. This effort eventually led to the introduction of Legislative ACT 478 in 1997, which mandated establishment of a statewide school and district accountability system (State of Louisiana, 1988). [Exhibit 1](#) illustrates the key phases of the state plan for school improvement.

Phase 1: The *Progress Profiles* Program, which began in 1990, was focused on providing access to accurate data on a wide range of factors believed to impact student learning. Statewide public school data for 1998-99, including accountability results, were used to prepare three levels of reports:

- the *1998-99 Louisiana State Education Progress Report*, a state-level overview of education for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders;
- the *District Composite Reports (DCRs)*, prepared for each of the 66 Louisiana public school districts, with available longitudinal data for trend analysis; and
- *School Report Cards*, issued in September 1999 as the first edition of the accountability reports for each public school containing any of the grade levels K-8. Copies of the 1998-99 school report cards were delivered to principals for distribution to all parents.

The state- and district-level reports are provided to district superintendents, school principals, and numerous public and university libraries. Furthermore, all reports, along with other relevant educational material, appear on the LDE Web site (<http://www.doe.state.la.us>). The state report, one district composite report in CD-ROM format, and one school report card are illustrated in [Exhibit 2](#).

Phase 2: The School Effectiveness and Assistance Project (SEAP), conducted by the LDE in conjunction with LSU researchers, was the second step toward implementation of the accountability system. The main purpose of SEAP was to build LDE internal capacity to identify schools in need, analyze those needs, and provide improvement assistance.

Phase 3: The Statewide School Accountability System began in the fall of 1999, with an initial focus on schools containing grade levels kindergarten through eight (K-8). The accountability program examines each school's progress based on statewide testing programs, school attendance, and dropout data. The Louisiana accountability system is explained in the next section of this report.

Implementation of Louisiana's Accountability System

The onset of accountability in Louisiana schools featured an assessment of school performance, followed by an emphasis on school improvement. Rather than being punitive in nature, the Louisiana model is focused on the continual growth of schools. [Exhibit 3](#) illustrates the Louisiana School Accountability System's five key components, which are briefly explained in the ensuing text.

Component 1: High curriculum standards. As an on-going effort to raise educational standards, the LDE has upgraded its curriculum and content standards in a substantial way. The SBESE set 10- and 20-year education goals for all Louisiana schools, based on the higher curriculum standards and defined in terms of School Performance Scores (SPS). Depicting the minimum educational performance level expected of each school, the 10-year minimum goal was set at 100 and the 20-year goal set at 150.

Component 2: Testing Program. A new, rigorous testing program for Louisiana students began in spring of the 1998-99 school year, with two main components:

- The LEAP 21 tests (criterion-referenced) measure how well students master new state content standards. The LEAP 21 tests are administered to students in grades 4 and 8. In the spring semester of 2000, LEAP 21 will become a high-stakes test, which means that no 4th- or 8th-grade student scoring unsatisfactory in mathematics or English language arts can be promoted. These students will be offered summer school and an opportunity for re-testing in July. The high school CRT is commonly known as the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE). Not yet administered in its new format, the current GEE will continue to be administered at grades 10 and 11 until the new format is phased in.
- *The Iowa Tests* (norm-referenced) compare the performance of Louisiana students to the performance of students nationally. These tests are administered at grades 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9.

Component 3: School Performance Monitoring. In the fall of 1999, baseline School Performance Scores (SPS) were calculated for all schools with grades in the K-8 range, using 1998-99 test data and 1997-98 attendance and dropout data. Baseline scores for grades 9-12 will be calculated in the fall semester of 2001. The SPS for each school is a weighted composite index, using indicators and weighting factors as outlined in [Exhibit 4](#).

Based on its SPS, each school was assigned a performance category, as described in [Exhibit 5](#). An SPS of 100 indicates that a school has reached the state's 10-year goal, while a score of 150 indicates achievement of the 20-year goal.

Once the SPS for each accountability school was calculated, a two-year Growth Target was set, defining minimum expected growth that a school must achieve in order to be on track for meeting the state's 10-year goal. In the fall semester of 2001, and every two years thereafter, all schools will be assigned Growth and/or Performance Labels, as described in [Exhibit 6](#), and will be expected to achieve a designated amount of growth. Thus, all schools are expected to improve. Schools performing at an unacceptable level will receive assistance and/or experience corrective actions.

Component 4: Corrective Action and Assistance. In the fall of 1999, the State began assisting K-8 “Academically Unacceptable” schools in Level I corrective actions.

- *District Assistance Teams* (DATs) conducted a comprehensive needs assessment, developed school improvement plans, and examined the use of school resources for effectiveness in all schools in the Academically Unacceptable category.
- The legislature provided a *School Improvement Fund* to assist these schools.
- As a pilot program for the first two years of the accountability plan, *Distinguished Educators* (DEs) began assisting some Level I schools. In future years, DEs will assist Level II and III schools only. Levels I-III are explained in Exhibit 7.

Furthermore, using workshops, conferences, and other means, the LDE works to inform and empower local education agencies to provide professional development for local instructional personnel. The final section of this publication details a few of the many LDE-sponsored activities used to encourage professional development.

Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school boards are expected to make extensive efforts to improve student achievement at under-performing schools. If a school fails to show sufficient progress after receiving LDE assistance, it will be placed in a corrective action process, which might ultimately lead to its closure. If there is inadequate growth from one two-year growth cycle to the next, the school is then placed in higher and more intensive corrective action levels, as shown in [Exhibit 7](#).

A school exits Correction Actions (a) if an Academically Unacceptable School's SPS moves above 30 and it achieves its Growth Target, or (b) if an above-30 SPS school achieves its Growth Target.

Component 5: Recognition. The progress of schools will be closely monitored by the LDE against interim 2-year goals as well as long-term 10- and 20-year goals. Schools showing progress will be recognized. The SBESE has recommended that schools receive monetary rewards when they meet or exceed their Growth Targets AND show growth in the performance of students who are classified as high poverty. Although rewards will be granted to the school, the disposition of funds will be decided by school personnel, with the stipulation that monetary rewards cannot be used for salary stipends. Other forms of recognition will also be provided for schools that meet or exceed Growth Targets.

Contents of this Report

This report presents information and analyses regarding various educational indicators for 1,507 Louisiana public schools. The report also provides educational indicator data describing K-8 performance results for the 1,188 schools in the accountability model. In almost all cases, data for the 1998-99 school year were used. However, 1998-99 data for dropouts and for financial indicators were not yet available when this report went to press; thus 1997-98 data were used.



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School Performance Results and Analysis

By nature, education is a complex process impacted by many factors, ranging from school setting and quality of instruction, to socioeconomic conditions and various cultural influences. [Exhibit 8](#) shows indicators which affect student learning in a school setting. These key indicators must be viewed together to provide a complete picture of the condition of public education.

In this section, after a brief introduction of the Louisiana public school system, results of the school accountability model implemented in the fall of 1999 are presented. Also included is a discussion of the key education indicators identified in [Exhibit 8](#), followed by state performance results relative to the indicators.

The Louisiana Public School System

There are 66 public school districts in Louisiana, operating 1,507 public schools. To provide an equitable basis for comparing school and district-level results, the schools have been placed into the four categories of elementary, middle (or junior high), high, and combination (K-12) schools, based on the grade levels they serve.

The first implementation of the accountability system, in the fall of 1999, included schools which had grades in the K-8 range. Based on this criterion, the 1999 accountability assessment included 1,188 schools. These schools were mostly from elementary and middle/junior high categories, with some schools from the other two categories as well. High school grade levels (9-12) will be included in the 2001 accountability assessment. [Exhibit 9](#) provides further information on all Louisiana public schools as well as the schools in the 1999 accountability model, while [Exhibit 10](#) shows school types and student population figures in the Louisiana public school system.

School Accountability Performance

The school accountability model described in the introductory section dictated that School Performance Scores (SPS) be assigned to each school according to a formula using scores on *The Iowa Tests* (30% weight) and the LEAP 21 tests (60% weight), and the attendance and/or dropout data (10% weight). The SPS in turn determined the school's performance category, according to the criteria in [Exhibit 11](#).

As [Exhibit 12](#) illustrates, 86% of accountability schools clustered in the categories “Academically Below Average” and “Academically Above Average,” with **state average SPS (69.4)** the point separating the two categories.

- Approximately 5% of accountability schools (57) were in the Academically Unacceptable category. Conversely, 9% of schools (110) achieved the top **three** performance categories, which require an earned SPS of 100 or more.
- Only one school reached the 20-year state goal of 150 (Academic Excellence), South Highlands Elementary Magnet School in Caddo Parish, with a school performance score of 155.7. At this K-5 school, the 487 students formed a population that was 38% minority, 5% special education, and 13% free and reduced lunch participants.
- Schools in the three highest performance levels, other than Academic Excellence, have a growth target of five points, while schools in the Academically Below Average category have almost twice as large a growth target, averaging 8.9 points. The Academically Unacceptable Schools have three times as large a growth target, averaging 15 points. The state average for the two-year growth target is 7.1 points.
- Schools in mid- to large-sized cities had the lowest average school performance score, at 61.9. The highest average school performance score was earned by suburban area schools (75.4).
- A total of 579,942 students were enrolled in the 1,188 accountability schools. Of these students, 53.5% (310,361) were in schools identified as being in the Academically Above Average and higher categories. Conversely, 46.5% (269,581 students) were in schools in the Academically Below Average and Unsatisfactory categories.

- **Exhibit 13** provides an accountability performance overview for the seven largest districts in Louisiana, based on total number of students enrolled.

Student Enrollment

Research indicated that public elementary and secondary school enrollments would rise nationwide between 1997 and 2009, with Louisiana enrollment projected to decrease by up to 5% between 1997 and 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999). Consistent with this prediction, statewide public school enrollments in 1998-99 decreased by seven-tenths of a percent (0.7%) compared to the prior school year.

A more detailed review of the district-level data reveals that approximately 73% of the school districts experienced enrollment losses, ranging from a fraction of a percentage point to over 5%. Experiencing the greatest losses were the Concordia, Catahoula, Franklin, Bienville, and Winn districts. Conversely, 26% of the districts showed enrollment gains, including the LaSalle and Tensas districts that led with enrollment gains of 10.9% and 8.7%, respectively.

Student Demographics and Economic Condition

Student Demographics. Louisiana is a culturally diverse state. Two major ethnic groups comprise the public school student body (PK–12): White students (49.8%) and Black students (47.0%). As shown in **Exhibit 14**, the remainder of the student body is composed of Asian (1.3%), Hispanic (1.3%), and American Indian (0.6%) students. Additionally, male students comprise 51.1% of the total student population as compared to 48.9% female students.

- Consistent with the state-level statistics, forming the majority of the accountability school population were White students (49.2%) and Black students (47.7%). American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic students in combination comprised the remaining 3.1% of the population.

- On average, gifted and talented students formed 1.5% of the student population in accountability schools, with a higher concentration of these students in schools that were in the upper three performance categories.
- Special education students averaged 12.4% of students in accountability schools, and were almost evenly distributed across the school performance categories. Averaging 12.5% of student populations in Academically Above Average and Academically Below Average category schools, special education students averaged 11.8% to 12.2% of the student populations of schools in the remaining categories.

Economic Condition. In educational research, the percentage of students participating in the federally-subsidized Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch Program is used as an indicator of family economic condition. The maximum family income for participation in the Free Lunch Program is 130% of the federal poverty level (for example, \$21,385 annually for a family of four). The family income limit for participation in the Reduced Lunch Program is 185% of the federal poverty level, or \$30,433 annually for a family of four.

Exhibit 15 shows the percentage of the Louisiana public school student body (K-12 and non-graded students) who participated in the Free or Reduced Lunch Program for each school district.

- Statewide, 58% of all students received free or reduced-priced lunches during the 1998-99 school year, reflecting a slight decrease from 59.2% in 1997-98.
- In 51 of the 66 Louisiana school districts, at least 51% of students participated in the program. In these districts, the percent of student participation ranged from a low of 51.1% to a high of 92.7%.
 - In the remaining 15 Louisiana school districts, at least 25% of students participated in the program. In these districts, the percent of student participation ranged from a low of 26.4% to a high of 50.2%.
 - For accountability schools, the state average percent of students receiving free and reduced-priced lunch was 65.1%. The proportion of these students was highest in elementary schools (67.8%) and lowest in high schools (52.4%).

- As shown in [Exhibit 16](#), the percent of students receiving free and reduced-priced lunch in the school population appeared to have a strong negative impact on school performance score, with a larger concentration of these students in the Academically Unacceptable (83.5%) and Academically Below Average (80.3%) categories.

Another economic indicator is the federal Title I program that provides additional funding for educating students from low-income families. In general, Title I accountability schools earned lower school performance scores than did non-Title I schools. A great majority of non-Title I schools (almost 80%) performed above the state average SPS of 69.4. Conversely, a much smaller percent of Title I schools (42%) performed above the state average. [Exhibit 17](#) shows performance scores for Title I versus non-Title I schools.

Class Size Characteristics

Research has long indicated that class size has a significant impact on student learning. All other factors being equal, smaller classes allow teachers more flexibility to develop individualized or small group instructional plans.

The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (SBESE) sets limits on maximum class size at various grade levels. According to *Bulletin 741: Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators* (1997b), the maximum enrollment is 20 students per class for grades K-3 and 33 students per class for grades 4-12. These limits do not apply to activity classes such as physical education, chorus, and band.

- There has been a marked improvement in the class size indicator for the state. The percent of classes with 20 or fewer students has been on the rise since 1993.
- In 1998-99, statewide, 37% of classes had 1-20 students, 38.4% of classes had 21-26 students, and only 24.6% of classes had 27 or more students.
- Forty-eight of the 66 Louisiana school districts had more than the state average of 37% of classes in the 1-20 range. Of these districts, 20 had over 50% of classes in the 1-20 range. Only six districts had fewer than 30% of classes in the 1-20 range. [Exhibit 18](#) shows the five districts with the highest percent of small classes.

Conversely, [Exhibit 19](#) shows the districts with the highest percentage of large classes (27 or more students).

- As suspected, class size appeared to make a difference in accountability performance results. The state average for large classes in accountability schools was 15.5%. As shown in [Exhibit 20](#), for Academically Unacceptable schools, the average percent of large classes was dramatically different, at 38%. With the exception of the top category, which included only one school, the average percent of large classes for all other performance categories ranged from 13.9% to 16.8%.

Faculty Qualifications

Qualified and effective teachers play an important role in educating children. Factors that contribute to teacher effectiveness include formal college experience, advanced education in the subject matters, teaching in areas of certification, teaching experience, and amount of preparation time devoted to classroom instruction.

- From school years 1991-92 to 1997-98, there was a downward trend in the percent of faculty holding advanced degrees (master's degree or higher), with an overall cumulative drop of 4.3 percentage points during the seven-year period. However, the 1998-99 data showed a reversal of the trend, with an increase of 2.2 percentage points over the 1997-98 data.
- The state average for faculty members with advanced degrees was 42.1%.
- Of the 66 school districts, 31 (or 47%) had a percentage higher than the state average of faculty members with advanced degrees.
- Statewide, the percent of faculty members with advanced degrees ranged from 27.5% to 60.3% in the school districts. [Exhibit 21](#) shows the districts with the highest percent of faculty members with master's degrees or higher.

Teacher Certification

- In the 1998-99 school year, 86.9% of Louisiana public school teachers were fully certified for the courses they taught.

- Conversely, 13.1% of the public school teachers were identified as having non-standard certificates. In other words, approximately 7,162 teachers either were not certified by the Department of Education, or were teaching outside their areas of expertise.
- Of the 7,162 teachers having non-standard certificates, approximately 2,484 possessed certification credentials but were teaching one or more classes outside of their certified field (such as a special education course). The remaining 4,678 teachers were not certified; however, all were required by the SBESE policy to be working toward state certification.
- The number of certified teachers declined slightly between 1991-92 and 1998-99. The decrease over the seven-year period amounted to 1.1 percentage points (from 88.0% to 86.9% of teachers with proper certification).

Student Participation

Student Attendance

Research has consistently shown that of all school-level performance indicators, student attendance is the single most important predictor of student achievement. Regular student attendance is considered particularly crucial in such subjects as mathematics and science, because most of the knowledge that students acquire in these subjects is learned in school.

- All school types showed a slight increase in attendance rates for 1998-99, compared with the 1997-98 school year. Not surprisingly, elementary schools had the highest attendance rate (95.2%). Attendance rates for the other school types showed combination schools at 94.1%, middle (or junior high) schools at 92.9%, and high schools at 90.9%.
- **Exhibit 22** shows the Louisiana districts that had the highest attendance rates (95% or higher).
- Statewide, the 1998-99 attendance rate for grades K-12 was 93.5%. In terms of absenteeism, this rate is rather troublesome, representing on average approximately

50,000 students (6.5% of total student population) who were absent for any given school day.

- If the statewide average student attendance rate were increased by only one percentage point, there would be 1.37 million additional aggregate days of student attendance. In other words, there would be an additional 7,648 students present in class on any and every given day of the school year.
- No district had an average attendance rate of less than 90%.
- **Exhibit 23** shows student attendance for the largest Louisiana districts, arranged from largest to smallest in terms of total number of students in the district.

1997-98 attendance and dropout data were used for computing accountability SPS for the 1,188 schools. For grades K-6, student attendance formed 10% of the computed SPS, while for grades 7-8, attendance and dropout rates in combination formed 10% of the SPS.

Student absenteeism appeared to have a negative impact on the school performance score. Average student attendance for the 1,188 accountability schools was 94.5%. As illustrated in **Exhibit 24**, average student attendance was markedly lower (89.3%) for schools in the Academically Unacceptable category than for schools in the other five performance categories (94.2% to 97%).

Student Dropouts

The Department of Education has implemented various programs to assist local schools and districts in reducing the dropout rate. These include disseminating information about successful dropout prevention programs; conducting visits to schools; and holding workshops and conferences on dropout prevention methods and strategies for teachers, counselors and school leaders (Southern Regional Education Board, 1996). Dropout data for 1998-99 were not available as this report went to press, thus 1997-98 data are reported.

- There was a significant decrease in the dropout rate for 1997-98 compared to 1996-97. Decreases for grades 7-11 ranged from 1.1 to 1.8 percentage points.

- In 1997-98, approximately 26,000 (7.9%) of students dropped out in grades 7-12. A larger percentage (10.2%) of students in grades 9-12 dropped out, equating to approximately 21,000 students.
- Forty of the 66 districts (61%) had a decreased dropout rate from 1996-97 to 1997-98.
- Among ethnic groups, the highest dropout rates were recorded for American Indian (17.7%), Hispanic (11.9%) and Black (11.6%) students. Lowest dropout rates were noted for Asian (9.5%) and White (8.2%) students.
- The largest decline in dropouts (for grades 7-12) was for Asian (2.21 percentage points) and Black (2.20 percentage points) students.

Suspensions and Expulsions

Suspension and expulsion rates provide insight into the level of student discipline and/or misbehavior occurring in schools. The rates are important school information because they measure how successfully schools and districts handle student misconduct. In general, schools that report higher suspension rates generally tend to have lower student achievement. Moreover, students who are suspended frequently are at greater risk of dropping out of school (NCES, 1998).

Schools and districts vary widely in disciplinary policies, often setting different levels of student misbehavior for suspension or expulsion. For this reason, discipline statistics are an imperfect indicator of student misbehavior from one school or district to the next. Because of this lack of comparability in district-level disciplinary statistics, comparisons among districts should be made with caution. However, using 1996-97 levels as a new baseline, each district's performance can be tracked across time with the addition of the 1998-99 data.

Suspensions:

- The in-school suspension rate for 1998-99 increased slightly over the prior year, from 7.8% to 8.1%, while the out-of-school suspension rate remained stable at 10.5%. In

1998-99, statewide, 63,578 students (8.1%) had at least one in-school suspension and 82,290 students (10.5%) had at least one out-of school suspension.

- Middle schools suspended the highest percentage of their students at 16.4% in-school (21,735) and 19.4% out-of-school (25,751).
- Elementary schools suspended the lowest percentage of their students at 3.4% in-school (12,975) and 5.1% out-of-school (19,705).
- Most districts with high suspension rates also reported very high attendance rates, which may indicate that the application of discipline works to lower student absenteeism.

Expulsions:

- Statewide, 1,779 students (0.23%) were expelled in-school, and 3,601 students (0.46%) were expelled out-of-school. Compared with 1997-98 rates, these rates represent an increase of 0.10% for in-school expulsions and a decrease of 0.03% for out-of-school expulsions.
- Middle schools expelled the highest percentage of their students, at 0.57% in-school (756) and 1.12% out-of-school (1,482).
- Elementary schools expelled the lowest percentage of their students, at 0.05% in-school (190) and 0.06% out-of-school (214).
- High schools and combination schools fell in-between, with in-school expulsions of 701 (0.3%) and 133 (0.3%) students, respectively; and out-of-school expulsions of 1,797 (0.78%) and 128 (0.29%) students, respectively.

Student Achievement

A new Louisiana testing program for students began in grades 4 and 8 in the spring of 1999. The program's two major components are briefly described in this section, with each component discussed in further detail in subsequent sections of this report.

1. The state's new criterion-referenced testing (CRT) program, ***LEAP for the 21st Century*** (or **LEAP 21**), measures how well a student has mastered the new state content standards. The LEAP 21 tests are administered to students in grades 4 and 8. The high school CRT is commonly known as the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE). Not yet administered in its new format, the current GEE will continue to be administered at grades 10 and 11 until the new format is phased in.
2. The state's norm-referenced testing (NRT) program consists of ***The Iowa Tests***. These tests are administered to students in grades 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 to compare the performance of Louisiana students to the performance of students nationally.

Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) Results

In grades 4, 8, 10, and 11, all students take the CRT, except for students who have met participation criteria for alternate assessment as indicated on their Individual Education Plan (IEP). Since 1995-96, CRT scores have been reported for both regular and special education students. The new LEAP 21 tests, implemented for the first time at grades 4 and 8 in the spring of 1999, differ from the previous CRT tests in the following areas:

- LEAP 21 tests are directly aligned with the new state content standards, which by law must be as rigorous as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
 - ◆ The new English Language Arts Tests have longer reading passages and a greater variety of item types. Constructed-response questions require students to craft written responses to what they read, and students in each grade must write a composition in response to a writing prompt.
 - ◆ The new Mathematics Tests have a broader and more challenging range of test items and problem types. For example, there are constructed-response problems, as well as problems with more than one solution and/or more than one path to a solution.
- Students will no longer receive a simple "pass/fail" but instead will receive one of five achievement ratings (LDE, 1999a):
 - ◆ *Advanced* — demonstrates superior performance beyond the proficient level of mastery.

- ◆ *Proficient* — demonstrates competency over challenging subject matter and is well-prepared for the next level of schooling.
- ◆ *Basic* — demonstrates only the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.
- ◆ *Approaching Basic* — partially demonstrates the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.
- ◆ *Unsatisfactory* — does not demonstrate the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.

Exhibit 25 and Exhibit 26 provide the LEAP 21 state-level summary CRT results for grades 4 and 8.

- In general, both 4th and 8th grade students performed better in English language arts than in mathematics. Further, on both tests, students in grade 4 performed markedly better than their counterparts in grade 8.
- In 4th grade English language arts, 23 school districts had a large percent of students (21% to over 50%) scoring in the "Unsatisfactory" category. On the positive side, seven districts had a small percent of students (7% to 9%) scoring in the "Unsatisfactory" category.
- In 4th grade mathematics, 35 school districts had a large percent of students (36% to 80%) scoring in the "Unsatisfactory" category. On the positive side, eight districts had a small percent (14% to 20%) scoring in the "Unsatisfactory" category.
- In 8th grade English language arts, 20% of all students scored Unsatisfactory. Although 19 school districts had a large percent of students (21% to 44%) scoring in the "Unsatisfactory" category, the majority of the school districts (71%) had a small percent of students (under 20%) scoring Unsatisfactory.
- In 8th grade mathematics, 40% of all students scored Unsatisfactory. Further, 29 districts had a large percent of students (40% to 80%) scoring in the "Unsatisfactory" category. On the positive side, seven districts had a small percent of students (15% to 20%) scoring Unsatisfactory.

- If the current LEAP 21 trend continues for tests in spring 2000, when the high-stakes testing program will go into effect, many students could be held back. Based on current numbers, up to 20,000 Grade 4 students and 21,000 Grade 8 students could be held at those grade levels, if the students fail to produce satisfactory scores during the summer remedial period.

Louisiana's improvement in student reading ability was recognized in October 1999 by The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), a body of federal and state officials that assesses and reports state and national progress toward achieving eight National Education Goals. The NEGP goals call for:

- ◆ greater levels of student readiness to begin school;
- ◆ student achievement and citizenship;
- ◆ high school completion;
- ◆ teacher education and professional development;
- ◆ parental participation in the schools;
- ◆ literacy and lifelong learning;
- ◆ improvement in science and mathematics achievement; and
- ◆ safe, disciplined, and alcohol-and-drug-free schools.

Awarded a Gold Star by NEGP for *Improvement over time in 4th grade reading* were Colorado, Connecticut, Kentucky, **Louisiana**, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, and the Virgin Islands.

Honored by NEGP for *greater than expected rates of growth in reading achievement between 4th grade in 1994 and 8th grade in 1998* were Arizona, California, the District of Columbia, **Louisiana**, and New York.

Graduation Exit Examination (GEE)

To graduate from a public high school, Louisiana students must accumulate 23 Carnegie units of academic credit and pass all five GEE components. Students who do not achieve the performance standards for any of the test components have at least two opportunities per year to retake those portions; they are offered remedial instruction prior to retaking test sections. GEE results reported in this publication are for first-time test takers.

The written composition, English language arts, and mathematics components of the GEE are initially administered to students at the 10th grade level. The first opportunity for students to take the science and social studies components of the GEE is at the 11th grade level. [Exhibit 27](#) shows Louisiana 1998-99 GEE results.

- Student performance (percent of students passing) for 1998-99 remained the same in social studies, but decreased from the prior year in the other subject areas.
- While student performance was poorest in mathematics, at 74% of students passing, the greatest decrease (4 percentage points) in percent of students passing from the prior year was in science.
- Louisiana students performed best (93% passing) on the written composition portion.

Norm-Referenced Test (NRT) Results

The main goal of The Louisiana Statewide Norm-Referenced Testing Program is to provide parents, students, educators, and policymakers with normative data that can be used to evaluate student, school, district, and state performance. In 1998, the NRT test administered to Louisiana students changed from the *California Achievement Test* to the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)* and the *Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED)*.

In 1999, the Complete Batteries of the *ITBS*, Form M, were administered to approximately 235,000 Louisiana public school students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7. Approximately 60,000 Grade 9 public school students were also tested, using the Complete Battery of the *ITED*, Form M. Using a traditional multiple choice format, *The Iowa Tests* assessed student performance in reading, language, mathematics, spelling, study skills, science, and social studies.

Results are reported as a national percentile rank (NPR) showing a student's relative rank or position compared with a representative nationwide group of students in the same grade (LDE, 1999b). Using percentile ranks ranging from 1 through 99, a "composite score" (an average of a student's performance on all subjects tested) provides a general indication of how well the student performed on the test. For example, a NPR of 42 means that the typical Louisiana student scored the same as or higher than 42 percent of students in the national norm group, and slightly below the national median score of 50. [Exhibit 28](#) shows 1998-99 composite score results for grade 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 compared to the national average. At all of these grade levels, Louisiana students scored slightly below the national average in 1999.

During the 1998-99 school year, the grade levels at which *The Iowa Tests* were administered in Louisiana were changed, making comparison data available only at 6th and 9th grade levels. It is encouraging to note that scores of both grade levels improved in 1999 as compared with the 1998 scores on *The Iowa Tests*.

- Louisiana 6th graders posted a composite percentile rank score of 45, up one percentage point from 44 in 1998.
- Louisiana 9th graders also increased their performance by one percentage point, since the 1999 composite score was 44 and the 1998 score was 43.

Reading Level Evaluation Results

The ability to read is crucial for surviving in modern society. While this vital skill is acquired readily by many children, for others it is not an easy task, requiring high quality early childhood programs that emphasize language, literacy skills, and formal reading instruction. Focusing on this important issue, the Louisiana Legislature funded a K-3 Reading and Mathematics Initiative in its 1997 and 1998 Legislative Sessions.

Louisiana's new *Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)* is a uniform examination, used statewide for the first time in the 1998-99 school year. The DRA is an essential part of the K-3 Reading and Mathematics Initiative, designed both to identify students at-risk of reading failure and to provide individualized instruction. Two major aspects of reading

critical to independence as a reader are evaluated by the individually administered DRA: (a) accuracy of oral reading, and (b) comprehension through reading and re-telling of narrative stories.

In the 1998-99 school year, 1st-grade students were assessed in the spring semester only, while 2nd- and 3rd-grade students were assessed both in the fall and spring semesters. Since a variety of tests were used by school districts in prior years, the 1998-99 scores are not comparable with prior year scores. [Exhibit 29](#) shows the statewide reading level evaluation results for grade levels 2 and 3.

- On the fall semester assessment for 2nd grade, of the 58,615 students, 43.6% (25,577) were reading on or above grade level. Conversely, 56.4% of students (33,038) were identified as reading below grade level.
- On the fall assessment for 3rd grade, of the 57,625 students, 65.5% (37,766) were reading on or above grade level, representing a significant increase over the 2nd graders. Only 34.5% of students (19,869) were reading below grade level.
- The spring reading assessment at both the 2nd and 3rd grade levels showed a gain from fall to spring in student ability to read on or above grade level. The increase for 2nd graders was appreciable, at 32.9%, while for 3rd graders it was more modest, at 4.2%. In other words, by spring semester, 76.5% of 2nd graders and 69.8% of 3rd graders were reading on or above their grade level.

College Readiness

American College Test (ACT) Results

Scores on the American College Test (ACT) are a widely used indicator of student readiness for college. Louisiana public colleges and universities require that all students applying for admission take the ACT. The composite score, which is an average of the scores for the four sub-tests (English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning), ranges from 1 to 36. It is a measure of the student's general educational development across these four subject areas.

ACT results reported in this publication are for seniors graduating during the 1998-99 school year, including test scores for 12th graders who took the test as 11th graders and elected not to retake the test as seniors. If a student took the test in both 11th and 12th grades, only the 12th grade score was included.

The reported statewide ACT scores include both public and non-public school student scores. This reporting method was deliberately selected to keep state statistics consistent with nationally reported figures, which are based on the combined performance of public and non-public students.

- For a second straight year, the Louisiana ACT composite score increased by 0.1 point (to 19.6). In comparison, the national composite score remained constant at 21.0.
- Of the states belonging to the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB), Louisiana was 12th of 15, ranking above North Carolina (19.4), South Carolina (19.1), and Mississippi (18.7).
- The Louisiana average composite score was 1.4 points below the national average (21.0) and 0.4 points below the SREB average (20.0).
- Louisiana was one of five states in the nation having the highest proportion of graduates taking the ACT (76%). The number of Louisiana students taking the ACT increased by 1.1% (392 students), as compared with a 2.3% increase for the nation.
- Proportionately more Louisiana students from poor families took the ACT than the national average. Fifteen percent of Louisiana participants were from families with an income of less than \$18,000, compared to 9% nationally. Furthermore, while most ethnic groups in Louisiana showed similar percentages of test takers as did the nation, a larger percentage of Black students took the exam in Louisiana (27%) than those nationwide (10%).

ACT research indicates that scores are highly linked to the amount of core coursework completed by the student. As shown in [Exhibit 30](#), Louisiana students who completed a typical college preparatory curriculum (four English courses, three mathematics, three social studies, and three natural sciences) were found to have higher average scores in all content areas (American College Testing Program, 1999).

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Results

The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is designed to predict success in the first year of college. Although student SAT scores are widely cited around the nation as an indicator of student preparedness for college, public colleges and universities in Louisiana do not require the SAT. In fact, only 8% of Louisiana's high school seniors took the SAT in 1998-99, compared to 43% of the nation's seniors.

- Louisiana's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for 1998-99 public and non-public high school seniors were well above national mean scores on both the mathematics and verbal sections.
- Louisiana's verbal mean score was 561 and the mathematics mean score was 558. The average scores nationwide were 505 on the verbal section and 511 on the mathematics section.
- For the period 1989 to 1999, increases in Louisiana's SAT verbal and mathematics scores outpaced the growth in national scores. Louisiana's verbal mean score increased 12 points (from 549 to 561), and the mathematics mean score increased 24 points (from 534 to 558). The national verbal mean score remained fairly stable, increasing only 1 point to 505, while the mathematics score increased 9 points over the same time period, from 502 to 511 (College Entrance Examination Board, 1999).

First-Time College Freshmen Performance

Not all students choose to pursue a college education. However, those who do choose college should be adequately prepared by Louisiana public schools to succeed in college coursework. The number of entering freshmen who enroll in remedial courses in Louisiana colleges and universities offers insight into the level of preparation that graduates have upon entering college.

For the purposes of this report, first-time freshmen (FTF) are defined as students who graduate from high school during a given school year and who enroll on a full-time basis in one of 29 Louisiana institutions of higher education (both public and private) the following fall semester. For example, the 1998-99 FTF data reflect the performance of

only those 1997-98 high school graduates who were enrolled in a Louisiana college during the Fall 1998 semester. Further, college remedial or developmental courses are defined as courses designed by universities to prepare students to succeed academically in college-level coursework. Although remedial or developmental courses may be offered for institutional credit (i.e., they are taken into consideration in determining whether students are full- or part-time), these courses do not carry degree credit (LDE, 2000).

Enrollment in College. As shown in [Exhibit 31](#), of the 38,360 Louisiana public high school 1997-98 graduates, 16,382 (43%) were FTF in Louisiana colleges and universities during the Fall 1998 semester. This number reflects an increase of three percentage points from the Fall 1997 enrollment rate of 40%.

Among the public high school districts, the percentage of 1997-98 graduates going directly to in-state colleges in the Fall of 1998 ranged from a low of 29% to a high of 55%. Between Fall 1997 and Fall 1998, the college-going rates of public high school graduates in 22 Louisiana school districts increased by at least five percentage points.

Remedial/Developmental Enrollment. In Fall 1998, the percent of public high school FTF enrolled in at least one remedial or developmental course decreased by one point, from 47% to 46% as shown in Exhibit 31. Among the Louisiana districts, the percent of FTF students enrolled in at least one remedial college course ranged from 26% to 79%.

Consistent with national trends, overall developmental rates for 1998 Louisiana public high school FTF were much higher at two-year colleges (78%) than at four-year institutions (41%). These figures suggest that less-prepared FTF seek an opportunity to acquire the skills necessary for college success in a less threatening and less expensive environment than that of a four-year institution. Also pointing to greater proportions of less-prepared FTF in two-year college settings are the 1998 ACT composite scores for Louisiana FTF both public and non-public graduates, which are 3.5 points lower for those enrolled in a two-year college (17.0) than for those enrolled in a four-year college (20.5).

Subject by subject, rates for public high school graduates who received developmental instruction as first-time college freshmen changed slightly between Fall 1997 and Fall 1998. Across all Louisiana public school districts, while enrollment rates remained the

highest in the category of developmental mathematics, the percentage of FTF enrolled in developmental mathematics declined from 40% in Fall 1997 to 38% in Fall 1998. In the categories of developmental English and developmental reading, the percentage of FTF enrolled remained stable at 23% and 13%, respectively. However, the percentage of FTF enrolled in other developmental courses increased from 6% in Fall 1997 to 7% in Fall 1998.

Ethnic Composition. The overall ethnic composition of the Fall 1998 FTF who were graduates of public high schools was similar to the Fall 1997 FTF class. These 1998 FTF were predominantly White (59%). Black students comprised the next largest ethnic group (35%), followed by Asian (2%), Hispanic (1%) and American Indian (1%) students. Data were not available on the remaining 2% of FTF students.

The ethnic composition of students in remedial classes also remained relatively stable over the same time period. For Fall 1998 FTF enrolled in remedial courses, Black students made up the majority of the population (48%), followed closely by White students (47%). The remaining FTF enrolled in remedial coursework were Hispanic (2%), Asian (1%), and American Indian (1%) students. Data were unavailable on the remaining FTF students. FTF student ethnicity statistics are based on self-reported information from college students, with results rounded to whole percentage points.